The Ryder Cup: A Study of Awareness, Interest, and Perceived Characteristics

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The Ryder Cup is the premier team competition in golf. Although it is an important event that attracts a large amount of media coverage it has received little attention from scholars in Sport Management. Played on a biannual basis since 1927 it has in recent times been plagued with accusations of overtly nationalistic behavior and a disregard for the spirit of the game (see Crenshaw, 2001; James, 2000). Recent European dominance of the event meant that for the 2006 competition the USA went into the match as underdogs. This study examines awareness and perceptions of the Ryder Cup in an attempt to learn more about its perceived characteristics, importance and how this relates to (re)presentations of the nation.

A detailed questionnaire, based in part on the CPI Index developed by Lyberger, McCarthy and Irwin (1998), was designed to address specific areas of perceptions and attitudes towards the Ryder Cup. Following minor revisions, as suggested by pretests, the instrument was administered using the mall intercept technique within the Mid-West region of the United States of America during the 2006 Ryder Cup. Questions relating to knowledge of the event, national identity and sponsorship, together with perceptions of 25 selected characteristics of the Ryder Cup, were used for this study. A total of 397 valid responses were collected. Selective random procedures were implemented to ensure heterogeneity of the sample.

Analysis of results found that awareness of the Ryder Cup was low with almost 40% of those surveyed not knowing what the event was. Of those who had heard of the Ryder Cup, 25% were not able to identify that the Cup was contested between Europe and the USA. Characteristics most associated with the Ryder Cup were 'Competition' (3.57), 'American' (3.31) and 'European' (3.15). Those found to be least associated were 'War' (1.44), 'Battle' (2.25) and 'Commercialization' (2.34). A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), based on interest, revealed significant differences in all positive identity variables. No significant differences were identified specific to negative identity connotations. An ANOVA based on gender highlighted significant differences at the .05 level associated with 'American' (.02), 'Winning' (.04), 'European' (.05) and 'Competition' (.05).

With the exception of the Women's Soccer World Cup, females ranked all of the other sixteen listed events/tournaments lower than men. Based on a 5 point scale the Ryder Cup (1.47) was ranked lowest of all by female respondents. Males ranked the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) tour as something they had the least interest in (1.81). Both groups ranked the Superbowl as the event they were most interested in (4.24 male) and (3.49 female) reflecting the hegemonic positioning of football within this particular geographical area.

Although extensive media coverage was afforded to the event the recognition and awareness of it was low. Preliminary analysis of results support literature highlighting 'the curious role of the USA in world sport' (e.g. Allison, 2005) where domestic sporting competitions were ranked significantly higher than international events such as the Soccer World Cups and the Olympic Games. Overall the Ryder Cup was viewed as unimportant in (re)presenting images of the nation. A more detailed analysis and evaluation of these results will be presented at the conference.

References